



Afternoon Alert - Wednesday, March 15, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Noon news

NTV led with a report that Defense Minister Inada responded to a question during Diet deliberations today by saying that she does not have any recollection of meeting with Moritomo Gakuen President Kagoike. TBS, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi also reported on the Moritomo Gakuen scandal, saying that Kagoike postponed his press conference originally scheduled for today in Tokyo. NHK gave top play to the annual spring wage negotiations, saying that base pay hikes remain low compared with last year.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Secretary Tillerson to discuss additional measures against North Korea

TV Asahi reported at noon that State Department Acting Spokesperson Toner said in an interview with the network that Secretary Tillerson will prioritize discussing additional measures against North Korea during his visit to Asia. He was quoted as saying: "This is going to be a key priority for Secretary Tillerson in his visit to the region to talk with our partners and China about additional steps we can take to curb North Korea's bad behavior." Concerning systemic transformation of the North Korean regime or preemptive attacks against North Korea, which are reportedly under consideration by the Trump administration, Toner reportedly said "all options are open."

The network also said Georgetown University Associate Professor Kroenig, who is close to the Trump administration, pointed out that the administration is mulling limited airstrikes against North Korea to delay its nuclear and missile development. He was quoted as saying: "Some of the options

under consideration are not strikes to take out the entire nuclear program, but perhaps limited strikes on missile tests to prevent them from conducting these tests and gathering new data."

### **Secretary Tillerson to seek China's support for applying greater pressure on DPRK**

TV-Asahi's daytime infotainment show took up Secretary Tillerson's visit to Northeast Asia, airing a video showing State Department EAP Bureau Acting Assistant Secretary Susan Thornton saying during a Foreign Press Center briefing on Monday: "This trip allows Secretary Tillerson to engage allies and partners on not only a range of bilateral issues but also importantly to discuss and coordinate strategies to address advancing nuclear and missile threats from North Korea." The program examined several possibilities for the "more effective measures" that the Trump administration reportedly contemplates implementing to deter the Kim regime.

Pyon Jin Il, a leading Korea analyst, projected that Secretary Tillerson plans to solicit China's views since any steps that Washington pursues will be ineffective without Beijing's support. The expert speculated that the Trump administration might use the issue of deploying a THAAD platform in South Korea, to which the Chinese government is strongly opposed, as a quid pro quo to obtain Beijing's cooperation for stronger pressure on the DPRK by promising not to deploy additional platforms or to withdraw the planned one after the DPRK nuclear standoff is resolved. He also conjectured that the Secretary may press China to limit exports of oil to North Korea or threaten to impose "secondary sanctions" on Chinese firms conducting business with the Kim regime. The show also examined the possible military options that Washington could take, highlighting a scenario in which the U.S. military employs F-22 fighters and B-2 bombers to conduct a "swift, surgical strike" against DPRK missile platforms and nuclear reactors. Pyon predicted that such an operation would be carried out without informing Japan or South Korea in advance.

### **Abe honors former House Speaker Boehner**

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe honored former House Speaker Boehner at a ceremony at the Kantei on Tuesday with the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun in recognition for his significant contributions to U.S.-Japan relations, including his role in making it possible for Abe to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 2015 as the first Japanese prime minister to do so. Abe expressed his appreciation for the U.S. politician by expressing his sincere respect for Boehner's contributions to promoting U.S.-Japan relations and peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Boehner reportedly said in reply that he will accept the honor on behalf of all the American citizens who have developed friendships with the Japanese people. An unnamed GOJ official was quoted as saying that the premier's speech before Congress might not have been possible without the significant efforts of the former House speaker.

### **Tillerson to hold first press conference as secretary of state in Tokyo**

Jiji Press reported that while concerns are growing within the U.S. that Secretary Tillerson has not held any press conferences even though over a month has passed since he took office, the Secretary will hold his first press conference in Tokyo as part of his trip to Japan, South Korea, and China starting on March 15. Jiji said attention will be focused on whether he will be able to demonstrate his caliber as the secretary of state by delivering a clear message on such issues as North Korea, which will be the main focus of his visit. Jiji wrote that although the Secretary appeared before reporters in Germany and Mexico, he only read out statements, adding that he has never answered questions from reporters. Jiji also said the Secretary caused controversy when he ignored questions from an NBC reporter about the relationship between China and South Korea during a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart at the State Department on March 7. Jiji wrote that some reckon that Secretary Tillerson is being cautious since he has no foreign policy or government experience, while the New York Times has pointed out that his media phobia stems from his Exxon Mobil days when interactions with the press were tightly controlled. Jiji said although the secretary of state is the second most influential person in the USG after the president, if he continues to avoid the media, he could jeopardize his position as well as that of the State Department. Jiji added that Acting Assistant Secretary Thornton announced on Monday that the Secretary will hold a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Kishida in Tokyo. If he takes questions from reporters, Jiji said it would be the first time for him to do so, adding it would be an opportunity for him to dispel concerns.

#### **Putin appoints special representative for trade and economic cooperation with Japan**

NHK reported this morning that Russian President Putin appointed Economic Development Minister Oreshkin to double as his special representative in charge of trade and economic cooperation with Japan on Tuesday. The network said Oreshkin will apparently be the contact person for negotiations with Japan to promote bilateral economic cooperation ahead of Prime Minister Abe's planned visit to Russia during the first half of this year.

- **Tillerson set to focus on N. Korea response in 1st Japan visit** (Kyodo News)
- **Japan Inc. agrees to explore opportunities in Saudi Arabia** (Nikkei Asian Review)
- **Japan should contribute to stable Middle East by supporting Saudi's reform** (Sankei)
- **U.S. demands immediate release of American held in N. Korea** (Kyodo News)
- **Private sector memorandums on projects with Saudi Arabia** (Nikkei)
- **Saudi Arabia, Japan agree to settle civil wars in Yemen, Syria** (Mainichi)
- **Japan names new ambassadors to Belgium, 3 other countries** (Kyodo News)

- [Russia's econ minister to oversee trade and cooperation with Japan](#) (The Mainichi Online)
- [Cartoon: Park Geun-hye](#) (Sankei)

## ECONOMY

### **USTR nominee stresses importance of opening up Japan's agricultural market**

NHK reported this morning that USTR nominee Robert Lighthizer said during his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday that opening up Japan's agricultural market is important and expressed the view that the U.S. will call on Japan to review its tariffs on agricultural products. He was quoted as saying: "I would list, of course, Japan as being a primary target for a place where increased access for agriculture is important." The network said the Trump administration views Japan's non-tariff barriers in the auto market and tariffs on agricultural products as problematic, adding that it is likely to urge Japan in the upcoming economic dialogue to take measures to address them.

Nikkei carried a similar story online, quoting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as saying this morning: "There were no such requests [from the U.S. side] in the U.S.-Japan summit last month.... We would like to hold constructive discussions at the planned bilateral economic dialogue in order to build a win-win relationship." The daily said, however, that Tokyo is increasingly wary of the Trump administration's trade policy given that the USTR, which for years has taken issue with Japan's high tariffs on agricultural imports, will be headed by Lighthizer, a known trade hawk.

### **Former member of Trump transition team comments on U.S.-Japan trade**

Nikkei ran a recent interview with Ado Machida, who served on the Trump transition team. Concerning the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue to be launched in April, Machida stated that the Trump administration is hoping to begin discussions on a U.S.-Japan FTA at an early date. While saying that the two nations may begin the dialogue by initially discussing economic cooperation in such areas as energy and high-speed rail, Machida stressed that the two nations cannot avoid discussing auto trade because the Trump administration gives priority to reducing the trade deficit. Machida added that it will be necessary for Japan to make additional efforts because the Trump administration lacks sufficient understanding of the increase in Japanese auto manufacturers' production in the U.S.

- [U.S. introduces new method to dispose of surplus plutonium](#) (Mainichi)
- [Lighthizer signals U.S. push for more access to Japan farm market](#) (Kyodo)
- [Editorial: Can struggling Toshiba find a way to move forward?](#) (Nikkei)

- [“Renewed Toshiba” to start from scratch: Interview with President Tsunakawa](#) (Asahi)
- [Troubled Toshiba faces steep climb to recovery](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Toshiba won’t sell chip unit to ‘politically problematic’ countries](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Toshiba putting Westinghouse on the block as reform pressure mounts](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

## SCIENCE

### [Shirahama zoo successfully breeds giant pandas](#)

NHK's "Close-up Gendai Plus" reported on a zoo in Shirahama, Wakayama, which has developed a unique breeding program for giant pandas. Instead of following the global practice of immediately separating the cub from the mother, the facility allows the mother to care for the cub as much as possible. As a result, the zoo has successfully bred many panda cubs in recent years, and China and other nations are following its example.

- [EU negotiator on climate change expects Japan to introduce carbon taxes](#) (Nikkei Evening edition)

## POLITICS

### [Cabinet decides prime minister’s wife is “not a public figure”](#)

Most papers reported today on a position paper approved by the cabinet yesterday regarding the status of Prime Minister Abe’s wife Aike. It reads: “‘The wife of the prime minister’ is a general term that describes the spouse of the prime minister. In using this designation, she does not have to be appointed as a public servant.... Generally speaking, a public figure is someone that occupies a public position. Thus the wife of the prime minister is not a public figure but a private citizen.” The GOJ adopted the position paper amid the Moritomo Gauken scandal, in which the opposition camp has taken issue with Mrs. Abe at one point having accepted the post of honorary principal of a school run by the company.

- [Prime minister’s schedule on March 14, 2017](#) (Nikkei)
- [Cartoon: Moritomo scandal](#) (Asahi)
- [72 municipalities did not allow absentee ballots in last summer’s UH election](#) (Mainichi Evening edition)

## SECURITY

- [Insights into SDF's withdrawal from South Sudan](#) (Asahi)

## SOCIETY

- [Let's play catch \(up\)](#) (The Japan News)
- [80% believed fake rumors of crime by foreigners in Japan after quake: poll](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Nearly half of teenage girls have been harassed by dating partner: survey](#) (The Mainichi)

## OPINION POLLS

- [LDP ranks No. 1 in ability to govern, Yomiuri Shimbun survey](#) (Yomiuri)
- [70% say Diet testimony by Moritomo Gakuen leader necessary, Asahi Shimbun poll](#) (Asahi)
- [Opinion poll & results from Asahi Shimbun](#) (Asahi)